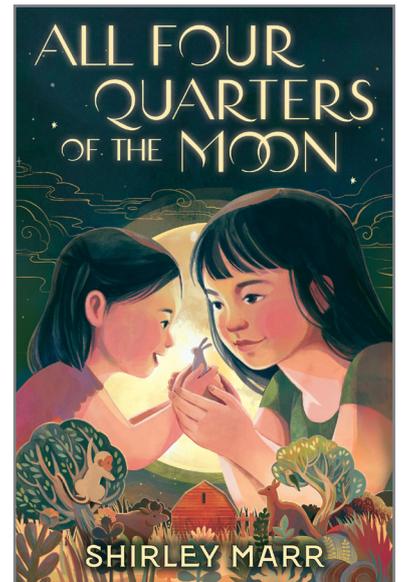


All Four Quarters of the Moon

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Making mooncakes with Ah Ma for the Mid-Autumn Festival was the last day of Peijing's old life. Now, adapting to their new life in Australia, Peijing thinks everything will turn out okay for her family as long as they have each other—but cracks are starting to appear.

Her little sister, Biju, needs Peijing to be the dependable big sister. Ma Ma is no longer herself; Ah Ma keeps forgetting who she is; and Ba Ba, who used to work seven days a week, is adjusting to being a hands-on dad.

How will Peijing cope with the uncertainties of her own little world while shouldering the burden of everyone else? And if Peijing's family are the four quarters of the mooncake, where does she fit in?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shirley Marr is a first-generation Chinese-Australian living in Perth and an author of young adult and children's fiction, including YA novels *Fury* and *Preloved*, and children's novels *Little Jiang*, *A Glasshouse of Stars*.

She describes herself as having a Western mind and an Eastern heart. She likes to write in the space in the middle where they both collide, basing her stories on her own personal experiences of migration and growing up in Australia, along with the folk and fairytales from her mother.

Arriving in mainland Australia from Christmas Island as a seven-year-old in the 1980s and experiencing the good, the bad and the wonder that comes with culture shock, Shirley has been in love with reading and writing from that early age.

Shirley is a universe full of stars and stories and hopes to share the many other novels that she has inside her.

Find out more about Shirley at shirleymarr.net.

STUDY NOTES BEFORE READING

- Take a look at the cover of *All Four Quarters of the Moon*. In 25 words or less, have a go at writing a premise as to what you think will happen in the story. Once you finish reading the story, come back to your prediction and see if you managed to guess any of the story beats!

- Make a short profile (this can be in dot points) of the characters presented on the cover. Who do you think they are? What relationship might they have with one another? What do you think their personalities will be like?

WRITING STYLE

- *All Four Quarters of the Moon* is written in third person and past tense, a classic fiction style. It also features a scene of Biju narrating stories about Chinese folklore and mythology at the beginning of most chapters. Why do you think the author opted for this interesting way to tell her story? What value do the Biju and Peijing storytelling scenes add to the text?
 - What do you think this method adds in terms of our understanding of the characters and even, possibly, ourselves and the world around us?
 - How do Biju's stories relate to the Little World that the girls create out of paper? And how do Biju's stories relate to the main story of Peijing and Biju coping with their new life in Australia?
- Every chapter has a story at the beginning up to Chapter Twenty-Nine, then the final four stories don't have one. Why did the author choose to stop the stories at this point in the novel? (Hint: think about what happens to the girls' Little World towards the end of the story, and what it represented about their childhood and growing up.)
- The final chapter of the book is presented as if it is a mix of storytelling and reality. Why did the author choose to style the final chapter in this way?
- Research more about Chinese folklore and mythology. Share these stories with your peers (try to engage in oral storytelling) and see what other morals and teachings you can uncover. Perhaps you can tell a story from your own cultural background?

THEMES

TRADITION VERSUS CHANGE

- Ma Ma is mostly reluctant about her daughters breaking tradition (for instance, eating Western food), but she starts to come around by the end of the novel. Think about it from her perspective, having left behind her family, friends and job, and not speaking the language of the new country. Can you understand why she might have such inertia? List specific examples of her motives.
- 'She told herself that Ma Ma cared about her enough to cook her a hot lunch and walk all the way from home and back again. The tragedy was that if she didn't learn to appreciate it now, one day she would look back and want to thank Ma Ma, only to find Ma Ma was not there to bring her lunch any more.' (p 126) Peijing comes to empathise with Ma Ma. Can you identify another example where Peijing develops an understanding for her mother? Can you also find examples of moments when Peijing is frustrated with her mother? What do these conflicting but equally valid emotions and moments say about family and love?
- Find instances where we see Ma Ma start to embrace her new lifestyle—for instance, her leaving the house, allowing Peijing to wear Western clothing, promising to come to Biju's next play, signing up for an English language course etc.
- Initially, Ba Ba spends most of his time working and not spending time with his family—as is the expected custom. Later, we see Ba Ba cooking, spending time with his family, wearing casual clothes instead of suits, and even joining in the girls' imaginative play with the Little World. Document Ba Ba's growth, paying attention to how his deeper involvement in Peijing's and Biju's life affects their relationship. How does he change? How does this change the dynamic of the family?
- At the end, which traditions, customs or rules have the family let go of, and which remain important?
- What does the tradition of making and eating mooncakes at Mid-Autumn Festival mean to the Guo family?
 - Share a favourite recipe from your family or culture with the class. What makes this recipe special to you or your family?

SIBLING BONDS

- How does the bond the sisters share help them transition within their new environment? Do you think Biju is lucky to have Peijing?
- While Peijing is the older, more mature sibling, do you think she still learns from Biju and her storytelling? List attributes that Peijing develops through her bond with Biju.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Throughout the story, Peijing feels a profound sense of responsibility for her family. Why do you think she feels this way? How does she learn to overcome this burden? Can you identify the people who help her overcome this feeling?
- Have you ever experienced a similar overwhelming feeling in your life? Why and how did you work through it?
- What other characters feel a sense of responsibility in the story—for instance, to uphold traditions or to look after the family?

THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE

- Peijing and Biju experience the move to Australia differently. A key determinant can be attributed to their age, with Peijing having experienced schooling while living in Singapore, but Biju being too young. Place yourself in the girls' shoes. Create a mind map documenting how Peijing and Biju react towards the changes. Try to think of examples within the text. For instance, Peijing has close school friends she leaves behind and experiences culture shock at how different school is in Australia.
- List the differences in the schooling system between Singapore and Australia you can find within the novel. Have a go at also listing the different examples of social etiquette in Chinese and Australian culture you can find within the text. Do some broader research for both and see if you can find more examples.
- Do you know anyone who has migrated to Australia? Write about your own experiences, or interview a family member, friend or someone in your community about their experience of migrating to a new country. Where is the person from? Why did they choose to migrate to Australia? What did they find different—or the same—when they arrived?
- Research prominent Australians who were born in another country, and write a report of their achievements.
- What negative experiences (such as racism or intolerance) do the Guo family have when they move to Australia? (Such as when they visit the store to buy school supplies and the clerk refuses to serve Ma Ma.) What positive experiences (such as Peijing making friends at the party) do they have?
- Research programs and services that are available to new immigrants in your community, such as programs to help with learning English, charities who help refugees find work or provide food or other resources.
- Do you think there is more help available now than in the 1980s when this book is set? Research what the immigration experience is like today. What else do you think would help new immigrants feel safe, happy and welcome in Australia?

HONOUR

- Research the definition of 'honour'. What does it mean within Singaporean/Chinese culture? Create a short presentation of your findings.
- Look up the Chinese symbol for honour. Have a go at drawing it yourself!
- How does Peijing struggle with the concept of honour in Australia? How do the Guo family learn to reconcile their traditional understanding of honour within a foreign setting?
- What does honour mean to you? Write your own definition and discuss how you try to apply it within your life.

COMING OF AGE

- What other novels have you read with 'coming of age' themes, or that feature a pivotal time in a young person's life that changes them forever?
- 'Maybe she was slowly outgrowing the Little World too.' (p 294). This quote is one instance of Peijing's growth, as she finds the Little World is not her only way to find solace anymore. Identify other examples within the novel that also show Peijing's coming of age and growing maturity. Can you relate to any of these experiences yourself?

IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

THE LITTLE WORLD

- For Peijing, the Little World is a form of escapism from the stresses of her life, a 'handmade heaven' (p 17). It is also a medium for her to channel her creativity and explore her artistic talents. Do you have a Little World of your own

—a secret world you have created that makes you happy? What would yours look like? Would you also incorporate animals as Peijing and Biju do, or something else? Have a go at drawing or writing about your Little World, making sure to write a brief description explaining what it is and what it does for you. Feel free to also name it something different!

- While the Little World remains largely a secret between Peijing and Biju and devoid of any humans, towards the end of the novel we see Ba Ba and Ma Ma (who mostly watches) participating in the Little World. How is this ironic? How do you think the Little World brings the family closer together?
- The Little World is one mode of art that allows Peijing to heal and find comfort. Art (eg., writing, reading, music) and being creative is known to be a therapeutic, enlightening experience. Can you identify artistic or creative activities within your own life that help you relax and get your creative juices flowing?

THE PHASES OF THE MOON

- Who or what do you think the title—*All Four Quarters of the Moon*—symbolises? Make sure to write a brief explanation as to why you think it represents specific characters, seasons etc.
- The moon is a recurring theme throughout the story. Do you think it has also played an important part in the cover design and internal design of the book? What evidence can you find of this? Can you find other symbols or themes that are used in a similar way?
- Find examples of Peijing noticing the moon or the sky, and what she observes and how it makes her feel. How do her feelings about the moon and the sky change throughout the story?
- The book is divided into four parts, describing different phases of the moon. How do the part titles relate to developments in the story?

STORYTELLING AND INTERTEXTUALITY

- Why do you think the stories connected to the Guo family are so important to them? How do the stories connect them as a group?
- Stories don't have to be connected to culture. Do you perhaps have stories within your family that only your relations know about? How does this make you feel about your family? (For example, do you have any relations who served in the military or perhaps changed your family's fortunes, or any tales of a family curse, a discovered treasure or a lost fortune?)
- Do you think stories can be powerful? Do you think the way that they are told and passed on can affect their message?
- Can you think of other characters in the novel (apart from the Guo family) who tell stories?
- Are there characters who could have amazing stories that we don't get to hear in this novel? Pick a character and write a brief backstory for them. (For example, Miss Lena, or the man who gives Peijing the chocolate bar at the corner store.)
- Research some of the Chinese myths that Biju re-tells in the novel, and write a list of what stays the same in Biju's version, and what elements she changes. Some of the stories you could look up include:
 - The Jade Rabbit
 - Chang'e—the moon goddess
 - The nian
 - The animals of the Chinese Zodiac
 - The god Pangu and the creation of the world.